Anarkhia in Classical Greece: A semantic investigation in selected tragedies

Anarkhia dans la Grèce classique : investigation sémantique dans des tragédies choisies

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ABSTRACT: This article conducts an investigation of the word *anarkhia* in Classical Greece, exploring its semantic development and usage in ancient Greek tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, including *Seven against Thebes*, *Suppliants*, *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, and *Hecuba*. Lexical, etymological, and historical analyses reveal that the term is associated with civil disobedience, refusal to obey, and power vacuum, supported by Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010), Rosenfield (2002), and Laffon (2018). The research contextualizes the tragedies within the socio-political and historical setting of Classical Greece, deepening the understanding of the significance and relevance of *anarkhia* across various spheres of thought and culture of that era. The methodology includes collecting lexicographical occurrences from the *Perseus* website, endorsed by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*®, and established Greek texts by the academic community. The study enriches knowledge about Hellenic civilization's language, culture, and political thought, contributing to Classical Studies and the understanding of Ancient Greek society and politics.

KEYWORDS: *Anarkhia*; Classical Greece; semantic context; lexicographic analysis; civil disobedience.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article mène une enquête sur le mot *anarkhia* dans la Grèce classique, explorant son développement sémantique et ses utilisations dans la tragédie grecque antique, à travers les œuvres d'Ésquilo, de Sophocle et d'Euripide : *Les Sept contre Thèbes*, *Les Suppliantes*, *Agamemnon*, *Antigone* et *Hécube*. Des analyses lexicales, étymologiques et historiques révèlent que le terme est associé à la désobéissance civile, au refus d'obéir et à la vacance de pouvoir, corroboré par Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010), Rosenfield (2002) et Laffon (2018). La recherche contextualise les tragédies dans le contexte socio-politique et historique de la Grèce classique, approfondissant la compréhension du sens et de la pertinence de l'*anarkhia* dans divers domaines de la pensée et de la culture de l'époque. La méthodologie comprend la collecte d'occurrences lexicales sur le site *Perseus*, soutenue par le *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*® et par des textes grecs édités et établis par la communauté académique. L'étude enrichit les connaissances sur la langue, la culture et la pensée politique de la civilisation hellénique, contribuant aux Études Classiques et à la compréhension de la société et de la politique de la Grèce antique.

MOTS-CLÉS: *Anarkhia*; Grèce classique ; contexte sémantique ; analyses lexicales ; désobéissance civile.

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1

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Introduction

Ancient Greek tragedy is one of the wealthiest and most influential forms of classical literature, providing profound insights into human nature, politics, and society in Classical Greece. In this context, *anarkhia* emerges as a prominent linguistic and conceptual element, spanning various dramatic works and carrying a series of meanings and implications that resonate today.

Given the importance above, this study undertakes a selective investigation of the word *anarkhia* in Classical Greece, aiming to explore its semantic development and uses in the context of ancient Greek tragedy. The research focuses on the plays *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, and *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, *Antigone* by Sophocles, and *Hecuba* by Euripides, all of great importance to Greek dramaturgy.

Regarding etymological analysis, the research addresses the earliest semantic contexts related to the word *anarkhia*, with emphasis on the notion of civil disobedience and refusal to obey, aspects discussed by Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010), Rosenfield (2002), and Laffon (2018). Additionally, the article explores the word's association with the vacancy of power, as Laffon (2013) debated. These etymological perspectives provide a basis for understanding the complexity of the concept of *anarkhia* nin ancient Greek tragedies. To achieve this, the study contextualizes the tragedies by investigating the socio-political and historical backdrop in which the tragedians were immersed. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the meaning and relevance of the term *anarkhia* in various spheres of thought and culture in Classical Greece.

The methodology employed included collecting lexicographical occurrences of the word *anarkhia* on the *Perseus* website, which features Greek texts established by the academic community, as well as in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae® — A Digital Library of Greek Literature* (TLG). These occurrences were detailed, enabling a broader understanding of the nuances and uses of the word in the studied tragedies. Additionally, a historical analysis was conducted using a contemporary bilingual dictionary to study the ancient Greek language (Malhadas *et al.*, 2006), referencing other dictionaries containing the term *anarkhia*. The meanings found for the classical period were investigated, addressing aspects such as etymology and the possibility of etymological reconstruction of the word in tragic theater.

Finally, this study sought to shed light on the relevance and semantic complexity of the word *anarkhia* in ancient Greek tragedy, contributing to the enrichment of knowledge about the

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2

language, culture, and political thought of this important historical period. The focused analysis of the contexts and uses of the word in the works of the three prominent tragedians offers a perspective for researchers interested in the linguistic and cultural aspects of Classical Greece.

The etymology of *anarkhia*

The term *anarkhia* has its roots in classical Greek texts from the 5th century B.C.E. and is employed to describe situations characterized by disorder or a lack of political organization. Malhadas *et al*. (2006) provide various explanations for this feminine noun:

> ἀναρχία, ας (ἡ) (*anarkhia*)
> **1** lack or absence of leadership
> **2** lack of authority direction; refusal to obey
> **3** anarchy
> **4** in Athens, the year without archons
> **5** lack of positions.
> (ἄναρχος) (*anarkhos*)
> (Malhadas *et al*., 2006).

These definitions are in line with other consulted dictionaries, such as those by Liddell *et al*. (1996, p. 120), Bailly (2010, p. 139) and others available on the T.L.G. website (2023).

According to Laffon (2013, p. 1), *anarkhia* is composed of the combination of the alpha privative,[2] in this case with the use of *an–* (ἀν), because the following word, *arkhè* (ἀρχή), begins with a vowel (Freire, 2001, p. 265; Jact, 2010, p. 491; Ragon, 2012, p. 164), a term that the author designates as "magistrature", hence, *anarkhia* would be a "vacancy of magistrature" (translation by the author),[3] but the author makes a caveat: "Il n'est pas facile de déterminer avec certitude et précision la réalité historique qui se cache derrière ce terme".[4] In some selected excerpts in this research, the term will have the meaning of civil disobedience, as defined by Malhadas *et al*. (2006), as "refusal to obey", ," as also observed by Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010) and Laffon (2018).

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[2] The alpha privative is a prefix that adds the sense of negation or absence to the word or root to which it is attached.

[3] "[…] de *arkhè* désignant la magistrature, littéralement: « la vacance de la magistrature »" (Laffon, 2013, p. 1) (emphasis added).

[4] "It is not easy to determine with certainty and precision the historical reality hidden behind this term" (translation by the author).

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3

Laffon (2013, p. 8) rhighlights that, among the Greeks until the 5th century B.C.E.[5], the term *anarkhia* was frequently associated with periods of political instability, "provoquant une rupture dans le cours normal des institutions politiques et des changements institutionnels".[6] Thus, *anarkhia* can both be the cause and the result of a "vacancy of the magistrature". For Sousa, Garcia, and Carvalho (1998, p. 18), *anarkhia* represented, in the context of political and democratic thought in Classical Athens, an "opposition to politically organized society". In this period, the concept of anarchy was associated with the idea of disorder, lack of leadership, and absence of a stable governmental structure. It was seen as a chaotic and undesirable state for society.

However, over time and with significant historical events, the meaning of the term underwent significant changes. According to Bobbio *et al.* (1998), after the French Revolution, anarchy added a positive connotation to its semantic field. Despite this semantic change, it is essential to note that the original idea of a leadership vacuum and political disorder remains one of the facets of anarchy, especially in turbulent historical periods or situations of political instability.

Methodology for *Corpus* Collection

The methodology adopted for the lexicographic investigation of the term *anarkhia* in the texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides focused on the plays where the term occurs temporally. These are: *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, and *Hecuba*. The quantitative collection of occurrences of the term was conducted through specific searches on the *Perseus* website,[7] where occurrences in the tragedies of the three authors were selected.

The qualitative analysis of occurrences of the term *anarkhia* was conducted by selecting representative excerpts from each of the tragedies, followed by our own translations, aiming for a better understanding of the word's usage in the specific historical context of the plays. The verses selected for analysis in this study provide a valuable opportunity for us to comprehend the use of the term *anarkhia* within the context of these tragedies, as its exploration contributed to a deeper appreciation of the concept and semantic development of the word in tragic theater.

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[5] Before the Common Era (BCE).

[6] "causing a rupture in the normal course of political institutions changes" (translation by the author).

[7] The *Perseus Digital Library Project* is a digital library initiative of Tufts University, initiated in 1985 to explore the potential of online libraries. It is a practical initiative to understand the transformations brought about by migrating libraries to the digital environment and their interconnectedness. The project has developed a website that provides collections and services with a strong emphasis on the Greco-Roman world's history, literature, and culture. 1995, it transitioned to the World Wide Web, expanding its reach and accessibility.

Thus, the research sought to identify the specific meaning of the word *anarkhia* in each text, observing how it was used by the tragedian and how it related to the plot and themes addressed in the tragedies.

The primary goal of the research was to trace the first use of the word in the sense of "civil disobedience", as defined by Bobbio *et al.* (1998, pp. 335-338), a concept modernly introduced by Henry David Thoreau's *Civil disobedience* (1849), and understood as

> A particular form of disobedience, insofar as it is carried out with the immediate aim of publicly demonstrating the injustice of the law and with the ultimate aim of inducing the legislator to change it. […] Civil disobedience is an act aimed ultimately at changing the legal system, being, in the final analysis, more an innovative act than a destructive one. Precisely because of its demonstrative character and its innovative purpose, the act of civil disobedience tends to gain maximum publicity. This publicity serves to distinguish it from ordinary disobedience clearly: while the civil disobedient exposes themselves to the public and can only hope to achieve their goals by doing so, the common transgressor must carry out their action in utmost secrecy if they wish to achieve their aims. The circumstances advocated by the authors of Civil Disobedience and which favor the obligation of disobedience rather than obedience are essentially three: the case of unjust law, the case of illegitimate law (that is, emanating from those who do not have the right to legislate), and the case of invalid (or unconstitutional) law. (Bobbio *et al.*, 1998, p. 335)

In other words, "civil disobedience" is seen as a specific form of disobedience that aims to publicly expose the injustice of the law and influence the legislator to change it. It is considered lawful and even obligatory by those who practice it, differing from ordinary disobedience in that it seeks to transform the legal system rather than challenge it. It is termed "civil" because practitioners believe they are acting as good citizens in circumstances that demand disobedience. It is a demonstrative and innovative act, seeking maximum publicity to achieve its objectives. Situations that justify civil disobedience include unjust, illegitimate, or invalid laws.

Table 1 below presents, starting from the earliest date, the occurrences of the term found in Greek tragedies via the *Perseus* website, arranged in chronological order, spanning from Aeschylus to Sophocles and Euripides.

Table 1 — Occurrence of the word *anarkhia* in Greek Tragedies

Words from the *corpus*	Occurrences of the word *anarkhia*	Play/Author	Dating[8] (BCE)
5341	1	*Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus	467
5214	1	*The Suppliants*, Aeschylus	*c.* 463[9]
8494	1	*Agamemnon*, Aeschylus	458
7662	1	*Antigone*, Sophocles	442[10]
7570	1	*Hecuba*, Euripides	*c.* 424[11]
34.281	5		

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from:
http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/wordfreq?lang=greek&lookup=a)narxi%2Fa

When analyzing the word count of the *corpus* and the occurrences of *anarkhia* found in ancient Greek tragedies, we can observe that the term is relatively rare compared to the total size of the *corpus*, which contains a total of 34,281 words with only five occurrences of the term analyzed in this research. This represents a ratio of approximately one occurrence of the term for every 6,856 words.

Despite the scarcity of occurrences, the relevance of the qualitative analysis of these few instances is undeniable. Each context in which the word is employed can offer unique insights into how the concept of *anarkhia* was understood and interpreted by the authors and the audience. Analyzing these verses, their relationships with the plot, and the themes of the tragedies contributes to a more complete and sophisticated understanding of the role of *anarkhia* in shaping meaning in the works of the three tragedians.

Translations of the *corpus* and datings

The approach of the *corpus* dfrom the Classical period requires caution due to the temporal distance separating us from that historical context. In this regard, to analyze the tragedies, we adopted the timeline established by Romilly (1998) as a reference[12]. With this observation in mind,

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[8] Established dating based on Romilly (1998, pp. 165-166), corroborated by Easterling & Knox (1985).

[9] According to Easterling & Knox (1985, p. 761), the date is later than 460 BCE.

[10] Romilly (1998, pp. 165-166) and Easterling & Knox (1985, p. 765) agree on the dating of Antigone.

[11] Around 424 BCE, according to Romilly (1998, pp. 165-166) and Easterling & Knox (1985, p. 768).

[12] We also relied on Easterling & Knox (1985) for inquiries, considering the framework of reference presented and demonstrated by the authors.

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6

we will now provide a brief overview of the tragedians and the works that constitute the *corpus* where the word *anarkhia* is present.

Tragedians

In the scope of the investigation into ancient Greek tragedians, one of the most prominent figures is Aeschylus (525/524 – 456/455 BCE)[13]. According to Romilly (1998, pp. 165-167), all of Aeschylus's tragedies were performed in Athens, the city where Greek theater reached its zenith. For the purposes of this article, as previously mentioned, three of his plays were analyzed: *The Seven Against Thebes*, staged in 467 BCE (vv. 1029-1032); *The Suppliants*, *c.* 463–460 BCE (vv. 905-906); e *Agamemnon* (vv. 880-885), which is part of the *Oresteia* trilogy presented in 458 BCE. This trilogy secured Aeschylus's victory in the theatrical competition of 458 BCE, showcasing the excellence of his dramatic creations.

The second tragedian to be addressed in this study is Sophocles (497/496 – 406/405 BCE),[14] known for his significant contributions to classical Greek theater. Among his works, *Antigone* stands out, cwith its performance in Athens likely occurring in the year 442 BCE. Verses 672 to 676 of the play are the subject of analysis, as they contain the word *anarkhia*.

Finally, the third and last tragedian addressed in this research is Euripides (480 – 406 BCE)[15], one of the most celebrated playwrights of ancient Greece. His play *Hecuba* (vv. 604 – 608) also forms part of the *corpus* of this study, believed to have been staged around 424 BCE.

Translations of the Tragedies

Aeschylus
The Seven Against Thebes

The first Greek tragedy to be discussed is *The Seven Against Thebes* (vv. 1029–1032) by Aeschylus, which represents the conclusion of the series of events narrated in the two other lost

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[13] Plays by Aeschylus: *The Persians* (472 BCE), *The Seven Against Thebes* (467 BCE), *The Suppliants* (463 BCE), *Prometheus Bound* (of contested chronology), and *The Oresteia* (a trilogy composed of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*) (458 BCE) (Romilly, 1998, p. 165).

[14] Plays by Sophocles: *Ajax* (date unknown), *Trachiniae* (date unknown), *Antigone* (442 BCE), *Oedipus Rex* (*c.* 420 BCE), *Electra* (?), *Philoctetes* (409 BCE), *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BCE) (Romilly, 1998, p. 166).

[15] Plays by Euripides: *Alcestis* (438 BCE), *Medea* (431 BCE), *The Heracleidae* (between 430 and 427 BCE), *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), *Andromache* (between 426 and 424 BCE), *Hecuba* (*c.* 424 BCE), *The Suppliants* (between 424 and 421 BCE), *Electra* (420 BCE), *Heracles* (between 420 and 415 BCE), *Ion* (between 418 and 414 BCE), *The Trojan Women* (415 BCE), *Iphigenia in Tauris* (between 415 and 412 BCE), *Helen* (412 BCE), *The Phoenician Women* (410 BCE), *Orestes* (408 BCE), *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *The Bacchae* (after Euripides' death) (Romilly, 1998, pp. 166-167).

plays, *Laius* and *Oedipus*,[16] by bringing the conclusion of the Labdacids lineage. The curse haunting the family finds its end here, marking the conclusion of a sequence of three tragedies and closing its relationship with the audience. The work serves as a dual conclusion: both of the trilogy and of the also lost satyr play, *Sphinx*,[17] which concludes the tetralogy (Mota, 2013, pp. 145-146).

After discovering the parricide and incest committed by Oedipus, his sons, Eteocles and Polynices, exiled him from Thebes. In response, Oedipus cast a curse and prophesied that his male children would never live in peace, even after death, and that they would divide their inheritance through bloodshed. This curse was one of the factors that led to the war of the Seven Chiefs against Thebes, culminating in the tragic death of both brothers (Grimal; Jabouille, 2005, p. 386).

The plot of the play describes the estrangement of Polynices, the eldest son of Oedipus, from the throne of Thebes, as his brother Eteocles refuses to relinquish power after the first year of his reign. Seeking allies in Argos to reclaim his right to the throne, Polynices leads an expedition with seven princes under the leadership of Adrastus. However, the war ends in disaster, with the Thebans emerging victorious. The brothers Eteocles and Polynices engage in a deadly duel, thus fulfilling Oedipus's prophecy. Eteocles is honored with a heroic funeral, while Polynices is left unburied by the orders of Creon.

In the analyzed passage, which is a subject of criticism among the academic community and considered "spurious", a crucial moment occurs where Antigone disobeys Creon's edict and decides to bury Polynices. Many critics[18] believe that there was interference in the play, allowing the construction of a connection between it and the famous *Antigone* by Sophocles. Therefore, these specific passages cannot necessarily be attributed to Aeschylus. The term *anarkhia* appears in line 1030 of this considered "spurious" excerpt during a dialogue involving the character Antigone:

> **Ἀντιγόνη**
> θάψασ' ἀδελφὸν τὸν ἐμόν, οὐδ' αἰσχύνομαι
> ἔχουσ' ἄπιστον τήνδ' ἀναρχίαν πόλει.   1030
> δεινὸν τὸ κοινὸν σπλάγχνον, οὗ πεφύκαμεν,
> μητρὸς ταλαίνης κἀπὸ δυστήνου πατρός.
>
> (Aeschylus; Torrano, 2009, p. 204)

> **Antigone**
> […] For giving funeral honors to my brother,

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8

I am not ashamed of this faithless disobedience against the city.
The dreadful common womb, from which we were born,
of an unfortunate mother and an unhappy father […]

The presence of the word *anarkhia*[19] the tragedy *The Seven Against Thebes* is intrinsically related to the situation of insubordination protagonist by Antigone in the face of Creon's order, which prohibited the performance of funeral rites for Polynices, considered a traitor to Thebes. Aeschylus employs the term *anarkhia* meaning "disobedience, insubordination". In this specific play, Antigone refuses to comply with the city's orders, which dictate that her brother's body should be left to be devoured by dogs: "I am not ashamed for this faithless disobedience against the city" (vv. 1029-1030, own translation), declares Antigone in the studied verses.

This passage is intimately linked to Sophocles' *Antigone*, as we will see later.

The Suppliants

In *The Suppliants* by Aeschylus (*c.* 463–460 BCE), the tragedy tells the story of the fifty daughters of Danaus, known as the Danaides, who are forced to flee Egypt to escape a forced marriage with their cousins, the Egyptians. Upon arriving in Argos, these women plead with the city's king, Pelasgus, begging for his protection and assistance to avoid the unwanted marriage. In verse 906, in the speech of the Herald, we see the word *anarkhia*[20] being used by the tragedian:

Κῆρυξ
πολλοὺς ἄνακτας, παῖδας Αἰγύπτου, τάχα
ὄψεσθε· θαρσεῖτ᾽, οὐκ ἐρεῖτ᾽ ἀναρχίαν.   906
(Aeschylus; Paley, 1861, p. 74)

Herald
You will soon behold many kings and sons of Egypt: have courage!
They will not speak of a lack of government/absence of leadership.

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[19] The presence of the word *anarkhia* in the tragedy *The Seven Against Thebes* is not necessarily commented upon by some editors and translators of Aeschylus' Greek text, as evidenced in works such as Paley (1870, p. 77), Morani in (Aeschylus; Morani, 1987, p. 75), Hecht and Bacon in (Aeschylus; Hecht; Bacon, 1991), and Sommerstein in (Aeschylus; Sommerstein, 2009, pp. 268-269).

[20] Indeed, the passage containing the word αναρχία is not commented on by the mentioned translators and commentators: Morani in (Aeschylus; Morani, 1987, p. 80), Sommerstein in (Aeschylus; Sommerstein, 2009, p. 407). Smyth (Aeschylus; Smyth, 1922, p. 88) observes that verses 904 to 908 are transposed according to William and that verse 906 could be written as θάρσει τοῦ χερεῖ ταναρχίαν, according to Robertelli's manuscript from 1552. However, he does not comment on the passage.

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

9

In the mentioned passage, the Herald seeks to reassure the Danaids, who are going through a difficult time, by suggesting that, despite the challenges they face, there will be no absence of governance, as several kings will be leading and helping them overcome their adversities. This passage from Euripides will be used by Bloomfield as an example and reference in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides; Bloomfield, 1830, p. 74) regarding the context of *anarkhia* addressed in *The Suppliants*:

> τὴν ἀξύντακτον ἀναρχίαν] 'disorderly insubordination'. So Æschyl. *Suppl*. 920. πολλοὺς ἄνακτας — τάχα ὄψεσθε· θαρσεῖτ᾽, οὐκ ἐρεῖτ᾽ ἀναρχίαν. (Thucydides; Bloomfield, 1830, p. 74)[21]

In Thucydides, according to Bloomfield (Thucydides; Bloomfield, 1830), the expression τὴν ἀξύντακτον ἀναρχίαν is translated as "disorderly insubordination" in English. This word describes a state of chaos or lack of order, probably referring to political or social instability during the war in question.

On the other hand, in verses 905-906 of Aeschylus's *The Suppliants*, the word *anarkhia* is translated as "absence of a leader", indicating the lack of rulers or leaders who can guide and lead people in difficult times. In this context, the character Herald suggests that, although they face challenges, leaders will not be able to help them overcome them. Therefore, despite both occurrences of the word *anarkhia* sharing the idea of disorder or lack of leadership, it is essential to note that the specific translation may vary depending on the context in which the word is used in each work. In Thucydides, the term seems to describe a general state of chaos, while in Aeschylus's *The Suppliants*, it refers to the specific lack of leaders. These contextual nuances are essential for a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the word's meaning in each case.

Agamemnon

The third occurrence of the term *anarkhia*[22] it is found in the play *Agamemnon* (vv. 880–885) by Aeschylus, dating back to 458 BCE. In this tragedy, King Agamemnon returns to his city after the Trojan War, accompanied by the captive Cassandra, a Trojan princess and cursed prophetess of Apollo. Upon his return, Agamemnon is received by his wife, Clytemnestra, who pretends to show affection and respect. However, behind this facade, she plans to avenge the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia,

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[21] The term τὴν ἀξύντακτον ἀναρχίαν can be translated as "insubordination disorderly" or "insubordinate disorder" (referring to the text of Thucydides History of the Peloponnesian War, Book 6, Chapter 72). The quote from Aeschylus in *The Suppliants*, verses 905–906, can be translated as "many kings — soon you shall behold. Take courage; they will not speak of a lack of leader" (own translation).

[22] The word *anarkhia* is not analyzed in: (Aeschylus; Smyth, 1926, p. 72), (Aeschylus; Morani, 1987, pp. 85–86), (Aeschylus, Torrano, 2004, pp. 61 and 165), (Aeschylus; Sommerstein, 2009, p. 101), and (Aeschylus, Trajano Vieira, 2020).

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

10

scheming, in collusion with her lover Aegisthus, the murder of the king. In verse 883, during a speech by Clytemnestra, the only appearance of the word *anarkhia* occurs in the play:

Κλυταιμήστρα
τρέφει γὰρ αὐτὸν εὐμενὴς δορύξενος   880
Στρόφιος ὁ Φωκεύς, ἀμφίλεκτα πήματα
ἐμοὶ προφωνῶν, τόν θ᾽ ὑπ᾽ Ἰλίῳ σέθεν
κίνδυνον, εἴ τε δημόθρους ἀναρχία
βουλὴν καταρρίψειεν, ὥς τι σύγγονον
βροτοῖσι τὸν πεσόντα λακτίσαι πλέον.   885

(Aeschylus; Torrano, 2004, pp. 162, 164)

Clytemnestra
[…] for he gives him shelter, the good host,
for he gives him shelter, the good host,
Strophius of Phocis, warning me
of doubtful scourges, your
danger by the walls of Troy, if a disorderly insubordination
should overthrow the Council, being congenial
to mortals to trample on the completely fallen.

In the highlighted excerpt, we perceive that during the reception speech to King Agamemnon, Clitemnestra expresses her concern about the lack of leadership and the dangers he faced in Troy, which could ruin Argos. The word *anarkhia* is used to describe the apprehension that Agamemnon's possible death in Troy could trigger a power struggle in Argos, where different factions of the family would fight for control of the city (Aeschylus; Sommerstein, 2009, p. 101). Laffon (2018, p. 16) portrays the tension in the verse as "the absence of government", evoking "the anarchic anger of the people". In a note, the author mentions the function of *anarkhia* in this tragedy as an element that emphasizes political conflicts and the instability of power, reflecting the chaos that ensues in the face of the possibility of a leadership vacuum:

> The substantive ἀναρχία is used in the v.883 of *Agamemnon* with an institutional meaning (absence of an ἀρχός or ἄρχων) to designate the vacancy of power caused by the hypothetical death of the king on the battlefield before power-vacuum becomes effective with the murder of Agamemnon.

The word thus acquires a critical dimension, highlighting the dangers of political anarchy and the devastating consequences that can arise when order is subverted. Aeschylus, by using *anarkhia* in this context, has Clytemnestra relate the apprehension and unease she felt during the period when the king was absent at war. As queen of Argos, Agamemnon's absence from the city was a time of great concern for her, as leadership and political stability were directly related to the presence of the king.

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

11

The uncertainty caused by this absence generated fears that political order could be threatened and that internal conflicts could arise as a result of this situation.[23]

Sophocles
Antigone

In Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* (*c.* 442 BCE), the daughter of Oedipus, Antigone, bravely defies the orders of her uncle, King Creon, by deciding to provide a proper burial for her brother Polynices, who was killed in battle against his own brother, Eteocles[24]. Antigone believes that, as a member of the same family, it is her blood duty to give her brother the proper funeral rites, even if it means disobeying the king's orders.[25] This act of civil disobedience[26] triggers a series of tragic events, leading to Antigone's imprisonment and condemnation to death by Creon.[27] The king argues that maintaining law and order is essential, even if it results in extreme measures.

In a conversation between Creon and his son Haemon, in verse 672, Sophocles employs the word *anarkhia* to emphasize Antigone's act of disobedience and her refusal to accept the political power *status quo* imposed by the ruler. The choice of this term emphasizes the tension between the power of the State and personal duty, as well as Antigone's courage in resisting the king's orders in the name of her ethical and familial principles. The use of *anarkhia* in this context allows for reflection on the moral and political conflicts present in the tragedy and highlights the complexity of governance and authority issues in ancient societies.

Κρέων
ἀναρχίας δὲ μεῖζον οὐκ ἔστιν κακόν.   672
αὕτη πόλεις ὄλλυσιν, ἥδ' ἀναστάτους
οἴκους τίθησιν, ἥδε *συμμάχου δορὸς

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[23] A similar case is recounted in Homer's *Odyssey*, where Penelope also finds herself using cunning to prevent the suitors for her hand and the vacant throne of Odysseus from squandering her kingdom and usurping his throne. Like Clitemnestra in Agamemnon, Penelope faces the challenge of maintaining order and stability in her household and kingdom during her husband's long absence. The suitors, believing Odysseus to be dead, try to take advantage of the situation and seek Penelope's hand in marriage and control over Ithaca.
Aware of their intentions, Penelope cleverly devises a plan to delay the marriage proposal while waiting for her husband's return. She pretends to be weaving a carpet for her father-in-law Laertes but secretly undoes her work at night, prolonging the process. This ruse buys her time and prevents her from having to make a hasty decision that could ruin her household. Clitemnestra and Penelope exemplify the challenges women face in positions of power during times of uncertainty and upheaval. They demonstrate intelligence and resourcefulness as they navigate complex political situations, highlighting the importance of effective leadership in maintaining order and preventing chaos.

[24] The theme of the play *The Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus.

[25] *Antigone*, v. 41–48 (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010, pp. 16;18).

[26] *The Seven Against Thebes*, v. 1030 (Aeschylus; Torrano, 2009, p. 204), *Antigone*, vv. 376–383 (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010, p. 78).

[27] *Antigone*, vv. 497–498, (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010, p. 98).

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

12

τροπὰς καταρρήγνυσι· τῶν δ᾽ ὀρθουμένων   675
σῴζει τὰ πολλὰ σώμαθ᾽ ἡ πειθαρχία.
(Sophocles; Jebb, [1888] 2010, pp. 126, 128)

Creon
There is no greater evil than anarchy.
It ruins cities, empties homes,
and causes allied spears to clash,
but obedience to the government saves
many lives from calamity.

Creon uses the word *anarkhia* to describe the gravity of civil disobedience and disrespect for established laws. The Theban king vehemently argues that anarchy is a destructive force that leads to chaos and disorder in cities, instability in households, and the breakdown of military alliances. For Creon, the absence of a strong government and disobedience to constituted authority are threats to social cohesion and the survival of the community. In verse 675, the monarch emphasizes the importance of obedience (*peitharkhía*) to the government as a means of protecting and preserving the lives of many people. His position is evident in defending the need to comply with laws and follow the authority of the king, as this is considered crucial to maintaining order and ensuring the stability of the State.

In the play's introduction, Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb[1888] 2010)[28] highlights that anarchy is the worst evil that can befall a state, and therefore, a ruler's first obligation is to enforce the laws and maintain order. The safety of the individual depends on the security of the State, and thus, every citizen has a direct interest in obedience. This obedience must be absolute and unquestionable. The ruler must be obeyed in small and large matters, in just and unjust issues (*Antigone*, v. 667). In other words, the subject should never presume to decide for themselves which commands can be neglected or resisted. By rewarding the loyal and punishing the disloyal, a ruler will promote such obedience. This approach underscores the importance of authority and obedience as fundamental pillars for maintaining law and public order.

In this context, the word *anarkhia* is used by Sophocles, as interpreted by Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010), to convey the idea that disobedience and lack of respect for laws can result in a chaotic and disorderly scenario, representing a threat to the community and the survival of society as a whole. The emphasis on obedience to the government and established authority is seen as

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[28] "Anarchy is the worst evil that can befall a State: the first duty of a ruler is therefore to enforce law and maintain order. The safety of the individual depends on that of the State, and therefore every citizen has a direct interest in obedience. This obedience must be absolute and unquestioning. The ruler must be obeyed 'in little things and great, in just things *and injust*' (v. 667). That is, the subject must never presume to decide for himself what commands may be neglected or resisted. By rewarding the loyal and punishing the disloyal, a ruler will promote such obedience. (Sophocles; Jebb, [1888] 2010, p. XXXV).

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

13

crucial to ensuring social order and political stability. It is at this point that the two Antigones, those of Aeschylus and Sophocles, converge, and the myth consolidates as a source in tragic texts.

Antigone is a clear example of civil disobedience in the play. She is willing to face the consequences of her actions in the name of her principles and personal beliefs, even if it means challenging established authority. For Antigone, divine justice and the law of the family outweigh human laws, and she does not hesitate to act in accordance with these values, even if it puts her on a collision course with state power represented by Creon. Regarding this, Rosenfield (2002, p. 32) comments:

> Antigone's rebellion inspires particular fear because Creon presents her audacity as a rebellion against the city's laws, that is, as a return of the curse that undermined the civic order in Thebes. […]
> Creon emphasizes the urgent need to rebuild the city by reordering it and putting an end to the severe disturbances caused by the Labdacids: the incest of Oedipus, the civil war, and the fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles, and finally, Antigone's rebellion. (Rosenfiel, 2002, p. 32)

Antigone's anarchic rebellion and Creon's inflexibility make Thebes an "anti-Athens"(Zeitlin *apud* Tatum, 2015, p. 96) since it presents significant contrasts in relation to Athens in its political aspects, such as the figure of the Theban monarch opposed to Athenian democracy. In this context, the Athenian spectator, characterized as "an audience imbued with democratic sensibilities" (Tatum, 2015, p. 94), contemplates the staged tragedy and does not identify with the events portrayed in the play. As Tatum (2015, p. 96) aptly noted, Athenians can go beyond mere observation and recognize that they do not see themselves reflected in the scenes presented.[29]

Euripides
Hecuba

The tragedy *Hecuba* by Euripides (*c*. 424 BCE) represents the last work in our corpus to be subjected to analysis. The plot unfolds in the final period of the Trojan War and features Hecuba, the wife of Priam, as the protagonist. In this play, the queen battles to prevent the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena in honor of Achilles and seeks revenge for the death of her son Polydorus, executed by Polymestor (Franciscato, 2014, p. 26). In verse 607, Hecuba pleads for her daughter's

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[29] "Perhaps in this instance the Athenians did more than merely look. But they knew they were not looking at themselves" (Tatum, 2015, p. 96).

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

14

martyrdom to be avoided in a scene that evokes parallels with the events narrated in Aulis, where Clytemnestra and Achilles himself interceded on behalf of Iphigenia:

Ἑκάβη
σὺ δ᾽ ἐλθὲ καὶ σήμηνον Ἀργείοις τάδε,
μὴ θιγγάνειν μοι μηδέν᾽, ἀλλ᾽ εἴργειν ὄχλον,   605
τῆς παιδός. ἔν τοι μυρίῳ στρατεύματι
ἀκόλαστος ὄχλος ναυτική τ᾽ **ἀναρχία**
κρείσσων πυρός, κακὸς δ᾽ ὁ μή τι δρῶν κακόν.
(Euripides; Gregory, 1999, pp. 18–19)

Hecuba
[…] Go and reveal this to the Argives:
"Do not touch, but keep the crowd
away from my daughter. In the numerous crowds,
the undisciplined troop and the ungoverned fleet
are mightier than fire, and wrong is not to act wrongly.

In the highlighted passage, Hecuba, the central character in Euripides' tragedy, expresses her concern and disdain towards the ungoverned crowd that can easily be incited to violence. Addressing the Herald Talthybius, she orders him to convey a message to the Greeks, asking them not to sacrifice her daughter Polyxena. In this context, the figure of Polyxena, about to be sacrificed, symbolizes the vulnerability and injustice experienced by victims of the whims of the unruly crowd.

Gregory's analysis (1999, p. 119) points to this passage's political and social interpretation. He suggests that Hecuba's speech reflects the viewpoint of the oligarchy, showing contempt for the "ungoverned crowd", which can be associated with an oligarchic perspective of 5th century B.C.E. Athens. In this historical context, there was tension between the democratic government and oligarchic factions, which is reflected in Euripides' theatrical representation.

The mention of the word *anarkhia*, meaning "ungoverned" or "absence of government", concerning the undisciplined mob, einforces the idea that Hecuba expresses a sense of discontent and distrust toward popular leadership. The possibility of violence and the fear that Polyxena's body will be desecrated like Hector's in the *Iliad* (*Iliad* XXII, vv. 367–370) add a tragic dimension to the scene, highlighting the vulnerability of victims in the face of the irrationality and impulsiveness of the masses.

Anarkhia: throughout the Tragedies

The first occurrence in the chosen corpus of the word *anarkhia*, found in Aeschylus' tragedy *The Seven Against Thebes*, directly reflects the courageous insubordination protagonized by

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

15

Antigone in the face of Creon's state orders, which prohibited funeral rites for Polynices, considered a traitor of Thebes. The term *anarkhia*, used by the author with the sense of "disobedience" and "insubordination", describes Antigone's audacity in challenging the city's laws and following her moral and religious principles. In this context, the use of the word emphasizes the conflict between state authority and individual rights, paving the way for discussions about morality, ethics, and governance in ancient Thebes.

Effectively, Antigone's verses in *The Seven Against Thebes*, marked by their undisciplined and anarchic nature, reflect her insubordination in the face of Creon's orders. On the other hand, in Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*, we find reassuring verses spoken by the Herald. By informing the suppliants that there would be no lack of leadership and that many kings would be ruling, the messenger provides a comforting perspective that they would not be thrown into chaos and disorder. It is worth noting that in both plays, the term *anarkhia* carries a negative connotation. However, the crucial distinction lies in the action represented. In *The Seven Against Thebes*, *anarkhia* arises through Antigone's insubordination, while in *The Suppliants*, the situation remains under control as there is no lack of leadership.

The last Aeschylean tragedy to use the word *anarkhia* is *Agamemnon*, part of the *Oresteia* trilogy. In this context, the term is intrinsically associated with the feared "anarchic rage", which manifests itself in the face of the possibility of a power vacuum resulting from Agamemnon's imminent departure for Troy, as categorized by Laffon (2018). Queen Clytemnestra's apprehension resides in the fear of a power vacuum on the throne of Argos, triggering a scenario of political and social disorder, potentially culminating in a "popular insurrection". Additionally, it is observed that Aristotle, in his work *Politics* (6.1319b) (Aristotle, Newman, 1902, p. 78), retrieves this exact term, applying it to describe the possible effects of a slave, women, and children insurrection on democracy.

The rebellious and anarchic potency of Antigone resurfaces in the eponymous play written by Sophocles, which personifies the resistance to obey the king's orders in the name of her family principles. This fundamental conflict between the adherence to laws and individual moral duties constitutes one of the central pillars of the tragedy, offering a profound reflection on the meanings of justice, authority, and personal responsibility in society. By developing the dialogue between Creon and Haemon, verses analyzed in this article, Sophocles presents a complex debate about the nature of power and the importance of obedience to laws, prompting the spectators to question their own conceptions about authority and justice. The word *anarkhia* plays an essential role in this discussion, highlighting the seriousness of the consequences of civil disobedience and emphasizing the crucial role of laws and order in building a stable and cohesive society.

In Eurípides' tragedy *Hecuba*, it is possible to perceive a shared concern between the queens Hecuba and Clytemnestra, albeit in different proportions. While Clytemnestra, in Aeschylus'

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

16

Agamemnon, feared the possibility of social chaos that could lead to a popular uprising, Hecuba, in the eponymous play, feared the agitation of an ungoverned mob, possibly incited by some evil, resulting in the desecration of Polyxena's body. In this context, Gregory (Euripides; Gregory, 1999, p. 119) draws a parallel with Book 22 of the *Iliad*, in which a crowd of Greek soldiers sought to approach the dead body of Hector, the Trojan hero who had burned numerous Greek ships, whose corpse was in Achilles' possession (*Iliad* 22, vv. 367-370). Although in different contexts, the queens' concern about the possible disorder of the mob reflects, in both plays, one of the various facets of *anarkhia* that permeate ancient Greek theater, offering the audience an aristocratic view on the consequences of human actions when guided by passions and unrestrained impulses.

The presence of the word *anarkhia* in the five Greek tragedies highlighted in this article reveals that, by addressing the conflict between state authority and individual values, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides offer a complex perspective on the meaning of justice, obedience to laws, and personal responsibility. The word *anarkhia* is used in different ways, whether to represent Antigone's courageous disobedience, the tranquil comfort of the Herald in *The Suppliants*, or the fear of a possible popular insurrection in Clytemnestra's mind in *Agamemnon*. This thematic diversity reflects the ongoing relevance of the discussion about the role of power and governance in building a stable society. The tragedies also address the consequences of chaos and disorder, resonating with social and political issues still relevant today. Through brief analyses of these works in the specific contexts studied, they invite us to reflect on human nature, social dynamics, and the complexity of political relationships, allowing Greek theatrical tradition to remain a legacy that inspires discussions and reflections on certain social behaviors.

Final remarks

In this research, our main objective was to investigate the meaning of the term *anarkhia* as civil disobedience and refusal to obey, based on the definitions of Malhadas *et al.* (2006) and the comments of Jebb (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010) and Laffon (2018), which were primarily observed in the works *The Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus (Aeschylus; Torrano, 2009) and *Antigone* by Sophocles (Sophocles; Jebb [1888] 2010). Disobedience and rebellion are intrinsic elements in the construction of the *Antigone* characters in these two tragedies, with *anarkhia* acting as a guiding thread of their personalities and an essential part of their identities, especially when the theme of funeral honors for Polynices is addressed. Anarchic rebellion has become a striking element in the mythological narrative of the courageous daughter of Oedipus, with the character being associated with "anarchy" in the two passages analyzed in this research.

These findings, even if they amount to only one appearance per tragedy, reveal the significant relevance of *anarkhia* as an important concept in Greek tragedies, providing a good

Codex - Revista de Estudos Clássicos, ISSN 2176-1779, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 12, n. 1, e1212410, 2024.

17

understanding of ethical dilemmas and, primarily, the political dynamics of society in Classical Greece, considering the richness of ancient Greek theater as a powerful tool for reflection on social, political, and moral issues.

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20